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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000049

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AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PASS TO AMCONSUL RECIFE  
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AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

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SUBJECT: EU-Venezuela Counternarcotics Agreement: More Optics Than Implementation

CLASSIFIED BY: Robin D. Meyer, Political Counselor, State, POL;  
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. Summary. The 3.3 million euro EU-Venezuela counternarcotics cooperation agreement, signed on December 29, was largely a political gesture toward the European Union, according to the EU's cooperation director Marc Fiedrich. Because the agreement was pending signature for a year, it will need to be updated significantly to account for changes on the ground during that period. Fiedrich expects implementation of the agreement by the Venezuelan Anti-Drug Office (ONA) to be very slow. With regard to the Venezuelan draft law on international cooperation (the "NGO law"), Fiedrich assessed that the goal of self-censorship by NGOs has already been achieved, even if the law is never enacted. End Summary.

#### A Political Gesture toward the Europeans

12. (C) On December 29, 2009, the European Union signed a 3-year, 3.3 million euro counternarcotics cooperation agreement with the Venezuelan government (GBRV); the agreement requires a GBRV counterpart contribution of 3 million euros. More than a third of the funding is destined for equipment purchases, specifically scanning equipment for the Caracas airport (Maiquetia) and an incinerator. The rest is targeted at improving ONA's database (Sinadro), a large-scale study on drug consumption, and a "Venezuelan Observatory on Drugs" for reporting and drug prevention efforts. The GBRV decided not to issue a press release on the signing of this agreement.

13. (C) In a meeting with Polcouns on January 19, EU First Secretary for Cooperation Marc Fiedrich said that the year-long delay in the signing of the agreement was due to Venezuelan efforts to negotiate standard EU agreement language on administrative issues, including the arbitration process for disputes and the termination process for agreements. He interpreted the GBRV's decision to sign the agreement -- two days before the available funds would have lapsed -- as a political gesture, since this was the only cooperation agreement between the GBRV and the EU. He discounted a GBRV interest in signing the agreement as a way of demonstrating its international counternarcotics bona fides.

## Outdated Agreement Needs Updating

¶4. (C) Because of the long lag time between the preparation of the agreement and the signing, many elements of the agreement were out-of-date, according to Fiedrich. For example, Fiedrich said the agreement provided for three body scanners for the Caracas international airport in Maiquetia, but he himself had seen body scanners at the airport (although not in use). Similarly, while the agreement included the purchase of an incinerator, he said the press had reported that the GBRV already had one. (Note: ONA inaugurated the first of ten incinerators in September 2009. End Note.) Lastly, the agreement provided for a comprehensive drug consumption study, but the GBRV had already conducted a study, although he noted that it appeared to be a poorly prepared assessment tool that relied solely on self-reporting of drug use.

¶5. (C) Fiedrich said ONA needed to update the agreement and prepare a workplan, a process he feared would be prolonged, especially since the ONA Director for International Relations, Manuel Gonzalez, who is the point-of-contact for the agreement, travels frequently. He also expected delays as different interests in ONA vied to have their priorities reflected in the updated agreement. He expressed concern that ONA's military orientation did not lend itself to developing studies or demand reduction programs. Fiedrich noted that the EU funds lapse after three years if not committed.

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## NGO Cooperation Law Already Achieving its Intended Effects

¶6. (C) Fiedrich noted that Roy Daza, the Chairman of the National Assembly's Foreign Relations Commission, had listed the "international cooperation law" ("the NGO law") as one of the Commission's top priorities for this legislative year, although Fiedrich recalled that Daza had said the same thing last year. Fiedrich, who had been an important critic of the NGO law when it was introduced last year, said the EU would certainly protest again if the law were reintroduced. However, he thought the draft law was already having its intended effect of causing Venezuelan NGOs and foreign donors to "self-censor" the type of assistance programs they participated in. Moreover, even if enacted, the law could not be implemented in time to affect the September legislative elections given the bureaucratic mechanisms that would need to be created.

## New EU Ambassador

¶7. (C) The new EU Ambassador, Antonio Cardoso Mota (Portugal), presented his credentials during the week of January ¶11. Cardoso previously served as the EU Ambassador in Peru.  
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